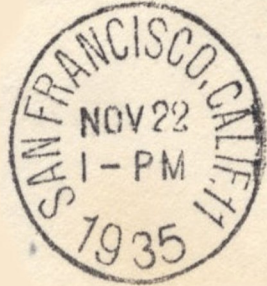


The Poet's Mechanical Fantasy



VIA AIR MAIL

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Short story by Daniel A. Stafford

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For those who love deep concentration, focus, the uninterrupted quiet necessary for creativity, and the world of paper and stout machines. - Dan

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It Started With A Sunday Morning Show...

He was watching CBS Sunday Morning with his wife. A segment came on about the resurgence of mechanical typewriters, and it included a famous actor.

There was an instant flashback to childhood, and memories of typing on old mechanical typewriters owned by grandparents.

In his thirties, he'd written a third of a novel on a Brother electric typewriter with a daisy wheel. He'd grown up in the world of paper. He still loved spiral notebooks and ball-point pens. He had a bit of fascination with looseleaf paper in binders, and there was a box of composition notebooks in the garage.

He owned a lifetime supply of number two pencils, and had bought an antique hand-cranked pencil sharpener and had mounted it out in the garage. An apocalypse could happen, and this guy would be able to write for years, or maybe even a couple of decades.

Still, he had turned the page on the typewriter nostalgia, and gotten back to work. The college didn't pay that much, and the commute left him with little time to spare, especially as he spent most weekends studying for new information technology certifications.

There was no such thing as "work-life balance." He often wondered why work always came first in that cliché phrase, but this world always seemed to glorify a buck over anything else life has to offer.

All said, he was a ghost of his younger and more creative self, a shell, a zombie for the job. His artistic side seemed to suffer in silence, suppressed by the spell of "making a living." Who's living was just perpetually left unsaid.

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A Layoff And A Movie...

It came in mid-June. The school where he was instructing closed. It was for dark reasons that he didn't know, and everyone was out on their can. He was sixty, and unemployed. Fantastic.

He was plugging away, looking for work by day, watching TV with his wife by night, and starting a YouTube channel on the weekend.

He used to be an avid reader, for decades. Then came the internet, and "smart" phones. The constant pop-up ads, notifications, and auto-play videos wreaked havoc on his attention span. Concentrate for hours on one topic? Ha! The modern internet and social media retrained his brain for constant disruption, not constant focus.

It was to the point where he almost wanted to go offline, to just kill off his cyber self like a vampire with a stake. Lord knows, it was sucking his time up like blood from a wide-open carotid artery.

Then he saw California Typewriter. The documentary was a poetic love letter to the Age of Paper and fully-manual precision machinery.

It was like a swirling vortex into a black hole going back in time to a place where writing could happen without electricity, without distraction. He could write in a cave in the jungles of South America as long as he had paper and ink ribbons.

The day dreams became ceaseless. Would it be a Hermes, with soft green keys? A red Royal with white keys and trim? Maybe a stout and faithful grey Smith-Corona. And metal. It would be mostly made of metal.

It needed to be portable, and have a travel case. One that could store some paper.

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He fantasized about getting a great job in I.T. and going up to **Berkley Typewriter** in ***that* Berkley**, on Union Street. He'd spend a whole day, and take at least a thousand dollars to spend.

He'd check the comfort of the key travel, and make sure the tops of the keys were slightly convex, so they cupped his fingertips. You don't want a finger slipping off a bulging key.

He was thinking of his priorities for the purchase, and thinking hard. Finally he settled on a list:

1. The typewriter must be all-manual, completely mechanical. No electricity required.
2. The machine must be portable with a hard case.
3. His re-entry into the paper world needed to be stout, with a mostly metal construction, and able to be repaired and maintained for many years to come. This meant it would likely to be still fairly common, like a Volkswagen Beetle or a VW Bus, or like an old Chevy truck.
4. His future Muse-portal needed to be comfortable to type on.
5. It needed to look as pretty as possible in public after the first four considerations. I mean, just look at the gal doing poetry in public spaces in the California Typewriter movie. He considered her a genius.
6. It needed to fit within his \$1,000.00 budget, with taxes and plenty of spare ribbons included.

He wondered if this would relegate him to a grey Smith-Corona, but he was hoping for better luck than that. He wanted style and panache, but not at the expense of portability, reliability, and solid, comfortable typing.

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Maybe he would be lucky, and the Angels and Muses of this Universe would guide him to the perfect day, and the perfect machine. Maybe the Norns would give him a lucky fate.

In the meantime, he does his typing on a computer with a full-size keyboard, and tries to make the page look like the typed-out novels and chapbooks of an old-school bookstore. Not a chain store, a real Mom-n-Pop shop with both new and used books.

Yeah, once he was typing for real, he knew he'd scan the pages into the cyber world and share them, but the cyber world would never again pop up a notification while his fingers were working the keys. Never again would his work vanish in a spike of voltage or a surge of current. No power outage would ghost his words. No subjugation to the vagaries of flawed RAM chips or the Blue Screen of Death.

He didn't know when that magical paper and metal "someday" was going to come his way, but he knew that it would, as certain as keyboard lessons could live online. He thought that maybe he should start taking those, now that he thought about it. After all, he didn't want to jam up the keys on his "Poet's Spirit Horse" the very first day with his two-finger hunt-and-peck keyboard style.

Forty words a minute would be just fine, and better than cream in his coffee. He liked that black anyway. The only thing he'd leave in the past was chain-smoking cigarettes. Clean air and un-burned pages, with maybe an occasional coffee stain. Classic.

Signed, typed, sealed, and maybe even delivered.

AquarianM - The Poet

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